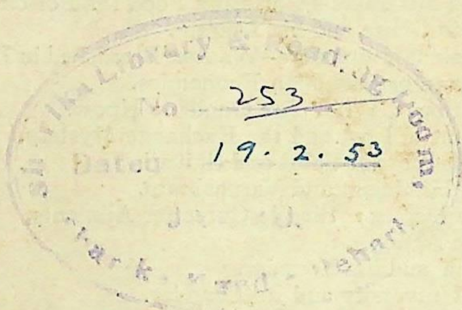
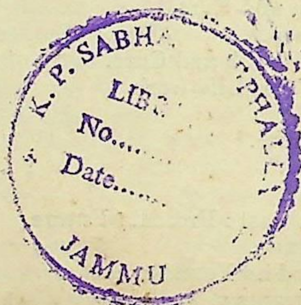
"MY MOTHERLAND" SERIES NO. 44.

SIR M. VISWESWARAYA







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SIR M. VISWESWARAYA

The economic regeneration of India is a question that has engaged the attention of Indian leaders during the last fifty years as, perhaps, the most urgent problem to be solved. But it has been given to only a few of our leaders to make any appreciable constructive contribution to its solution. Gandhiji, by the force of his unique genius, has addressed himself to rural economic regeneration through handspinning and the revival of village industries. There have been others, who have pleaded for reform along Western lines and who have given great impetus to industrial development in the country either as administrators or capitalists. Sir M. Visweswaraya is one of the noblest representatives of this latter class.

When able and patriotic Indians have been in charge of Indian States' administrations, they have succeeded in achieving what British administrators or Indians in British service have often lamentably failed to achieve. This has provided an example of what Indians themselves, given the scope and freedom of action, can achieve as Statesmen and Administrators. If, for instance, Mysore is to-day proud of her big industrial, irrigational, hydro-electric and other concerns, it has been due to a line of far-seeing and gifted Dewans of whom Sir M. Visweswaraya is perhaps the most distinguished. Yet in Mysore, as in other Indian States, fiscal freedom in the larger sense does not exist. Economic development is conditioned by limitations which obtain in India as a whole and which hamper rapid economic progress.

Early Life and Career

Sir Mokshagundam Visweswaraya was born in 1861 of a poor and orthodox family in the Chikballapur Taluk, (Kolar District) and receiving his early education in his native town, joined the Central College at Bangalore. He took his B. A. Degree in 1881. He then proceeded as a Mysore Government scholar to Poona where he secured the first place in the

L. C. E. Examination and the much coveted guaranteed appointment in 1884. He served as Assistant Engineer in Nasik, Khandesh and Poona. His services were lent to the Sukkur Municipality in 1894 where he designed and carried out a Water-Works Scheme. He served at Surat as an Executive Engineer, then as Superintending Engineer, Poona (1897—1899), Sanitary Engineer, Bombay, and Member, Sanitary Board (1901) and was Secretary, Public Works Department, Bombay (1907). His services were lent to the Hyderabad State to supervise and carry out huge engineering works consequent upon the Musi floods. He retired from British service in 1909 on a special pension, having won great appreciation for his energy and skill as an Engineer. He had proved himself fully equal, if not superior, to the best Engineers available from abroad, and had risen to the highest official appointment which was open in those days, to an Indian Engineer in a Provincial Government.

While still in service he availed himself of such opportunities as he had to travel extensively in foreign countries. He visited China and Japan in 1898, and we learn that while in China, where his fame as an Engineering genius had preceded him, he was offered the post of Chief Advisor in Engineering to the Chinese Government—an honour which was however declined. He designed and constructed automatic gates patented by him at Lake Fife Storage Reservoir in Scotland.

During his service of 25 years in the Bombay Presidency, and mostly in Maharashtra, Sir Visweswaraya had acquired a wide and intimate knowledge of the poverty and problems of our people. The stirrings of a new national awakening in 1906 had not left him unaffected, and the friendship of such men as Ranade and Gokhale had only deepened his zeal in the cause of economic progress.

After retirement from British service Sir M. Visweswaraya came to the land of his birth in 1909 on the invitation of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore to be Chief Engineer to the Government. He put new life into the rank and file of the department and the many engineering schemes for which Mysore has become justly famous were

planned and executed under his initiative. After serving for three years as the Chief Engineer, His Highness was pleased to call him to fill the office of the Dewan of the State. It was an unprecedented measure for the head of a technical department without previous revenue and administrative experience in the State to be called to the highest office in the State, but it was a gesture of appreciation and confidence from the Sovereign who had quickly discerned Sir M. Visweswaraya's masterful devotion to the cause of his country's progress.

As Dewan of Mysore

His Dewanship of six years was a period of unrelaxed activity, and Mysore, which had inherited a bright tradition of progressive administration, gained glory and prestige in the eyes of our fellow-countrymen. The lofty motives that actuated him on the assumption of his high office may be seen in the following sentences which he uttered in reply to an address from the Mysore Engineers' Association: "It will, I hope, not be regarded as an affectation of modesty on my part," he said, "if I say that all I have wanted is opportunity for work and that thoughts of personal advancement have not influenced my actions in recent years. With the important duties now graciously entrusted to me by His Highness the Maharaja, I have all the scope for work that I may have longed for. I seek no further reward. The pleasure of working for a few years more, of serving my Sovereign and my country is enough for me."

"There is waste going on in the business life of our people in many ways," he said in a speech to the Mysore Economic Conference in 1914, "waste both of resources and of opportunities. There is waste of energy due to insufficient occupation, because agriculture gives full employment for only six or seven months in the year. There is waste due to illiteracy, because 94 persons out of every 100 are uneducated. There is waste through ignorance of the ways of civilized people, because we fail to utilize their accumulated asset of wisdom and experience................Mental energy is wasted in caste disputes and village factions................The largest waste of all is the lack of capacity for co-operation, the difficulty of ensuring harmony, sympathy and oneness of

feeling, in matters affecting the larger interests of the State."

"If we are to follow in the wake of other countries in the pursuit of material prosperity," he said on the same occasion, "we must give up aimless activities and bring our ideals into line with the standards of the West, namely, to spread education in all grades, multiply occupations and increase production and wealth. All other activities should conform themselves to the economic ideal."

He addressed himself to the task of the economic regeneration of Mysore with the zeal of an evangelist. In speech after speech which he delivered before the Representative Assembly, the Legislative Council and the Mysore Economic Conference, he developed the theme that illiteracy and poverty must be banished, that people should be trained to live a more active and productive life, that ceaseless efforts must be made in accordance with a deliberate plan to reach certain standards so that the lot of the common man may be bettered and every one may have comparative comfort and competence.

Titanic Energy

As Dewan, with ample opportunities to shape public policy, he gave himself or others no rest. He worked with titanic energy for all round progress in the educational, social, civic, and economic life of the State. The Mysore Economic Conference, the Kannambadi project (Krishnarajasagara Dam), the Government Industrial concerns like the Sandalwood oil and Soap factories, the precursors of other private enterprises, the Bhadravati Iron Works, the Mysore Bank, the extension of the Mysore Railways, the Mysore University, the arrangements to give foreign training to officers in Government Service, the schemes of Village Improvement, including the efforts that were made for the restoration of minor tanks in the State by the voluntary efforts of villagers themselves, may be mentioned as among the concrete achievements of his administration.

More important than these concrete achievements, however, are the earnestness and purposefulness with which he

infused not only the officials but the non-officials in the discharge of their public duties. The systematic tours and inspections and surprise visits undertaken by him, bereft of every vestige of pomp and circumstance, tended to tidy up not merely the roadsides but the mental outlook of the officials of the locality who were expected to be ever alive to the goal to be achieved and clear as to the means of achieving it. One could see the officials prior to his inspection sitting up and consulting one another and coaching themselves with facts and figures, with the anxiety and assiduity of students preparing for an examination ordeal.

For the Harijans

The Mysore Economic Conference which functioned in Mysore for nearly a decade and which is now 'axed' owing to financial stringency in the State, was a pet creation of Sir M. Visweswaraya. It consisted of three Boards, those of Education, Agriculture, and Industry and Commerce, and had a Standing Committee to co-ordinate the activities of the three Boards. Each of these Boards had officials and nominated non-officials, drew up annual programmes, divided itself into sub-committees for the investigation and consideration of various problems. It must be admitted that much of the work done was academic, but the deliberations of these bodies often resulted in practical measures of an ameliorative character, and the proceedings of these Sub-committees, Boards and Conferences constitute valuable literature on development problems in the Mysore State.

The increasing association of the non-official public with the governance of the State and the status thus accorded to leaders of public opinion in making their constructive contribution to the State must be considered a very valuable achievement to his credit.

In a speech to the Legislative Council on another occasion he said: "In a semi-developed country like ours we need for the public service every brain that can devise and every hand that can execute measures to foster progress. We should do nothing to discourage effort and action. Otherwise

the energy and driving power which the country sorely needs may dry up at its very source."

Sir M. Visweswaraya was impatient to level up the differences that render corporate life and action so difficult. Speaking of the Depressed Classes and differences among them he said in 1914: " None of these communities will drink out of the same well, or allow their children to drink out of the same fountain of learning. If one good well were built in the village it might serve all. One large school might accommodate all classes and creeds and all grades under one roof. Most villages can afford to construct one such well and provide for one such school if they clubbed all their resources for the attempt. But as matters stand, the resources are frittered away and none of the communities get a good well or an efficiently managed school. There is no country I can recall in which artificial differences are carried to this ridiculous extreme."

Indianization

The institution of scholarships and increased facilities for the education of the youths of backward and Depressed Classes—a measure which in British India is engaging such earnest attention at the present time—was initiated in Mysore during his time in 1917.

With abundant faith in the capacity of his fellow-countrymen, he made systematic attempts to Indianise, and even Mysoreanise, the administration by arranging for the foreign training of eligible young men. He has been entirely free from the inferiority complex which infected many educated Indians of his generation. It was this sense of equality, again, that, as reports go, moved him to abolish the distinctions which had prevailed till then in regard to the seating arrangements at the Dasara Durbar as between European and Indian Darbaris. The Europeans had seating arrangements made for them, whereas Indian invitees had to squat on the floor. But at his instance the distinction was done away with, and the European and Indian were accorded h e same amenities. This may appear to be a small matter

but speaks volumes of the spirit which would not brook diffierential treatment where many others before him had submitted in deference to custom.

Cosmopolitan in his outlook and of refined instincts, any exhibition of communal bias and disharmony has been distasteful to him. During his Dewanship, public life had not yet been disfigured by the exhibition of rank communalism, but there were occasional forebodings of the gathering clouds. On one such occasion, in 1917, when he felt that some of the speeches were marked by needless bitterness, he made the following feelingful exhortation to the members of the Mysore Legislative Council: "I would appeal to the members with all the earnestness I can command not to utilize these occasions for creating differences. There are so few workers in the country that lack of harmony among these few would be a calamity. This is a time when co-ordination of effort and harmony of feeling and action are most wanted. At such a time, to encourage differences is like sowing lantana in a fruit garden. Disunion grows fast, much faster than harmony, and when the weed grows, let me assure you, it will be an unhappy day for you and me and the people of our State."

To Weld the Nation

This plea for building up corporate activities in every sphere of national life and eliminating all forces and tendencies of a disruptive nature rings out with great earnestness in his numerous public utterances. His book *Reconstructing India* indeed contains definite suggestions for an Indianization programme (p. 284-6) to achieve results similar to the Americanization that has gone on in the United States to weld different peoples into a well-knit national unit. In this, as in the economic programme which he has often put forward with unflagging zeal for public consideration and adoption, his ideas reflect those of the highly organised modern countries of the West.

Sir M. Visweswaraya laid down his high office toward the end of 1911. The Montford Scheme of reforms was then on the anvil and the new Government of India Act was passed and in 1919, Sir Visweswaraya desired to place

suggestions for a bold policy of reconstruction in all directions in view of the 'extensive changes' introduced by the new Act. These suggestions he embodied in his *Reconstructing India* (1920) published by P. S. King & Son, London. He was anxious that a new type of Indian citizenship purposeful, progressive and self-respecting should be created and a self-reliant nationhood developed. The book bears the stamp of his great earnestness, his passion for progress and his patriotic fervour.

After Retirement

Though Sir M. Visweswaraya had retired from office, he resumed his association with the further development of the Bhadaravati Iron Works. Public criticism against the former as a white elephant and as a source of drain on the State's resources was so strong that Sir M. Visweswaraya decided to preside over the management and develop it with suitable subsidiary industries so as to make it more productive. He refused to listen to the counsel of despair but urged that not only the Iron Works but other industries should be started even though they might not yield big profits, if only for the healthy *morale* they would create among the people.

He was likewise associated with the big tunnel works—a tunnel of a mile and six furlongs in length, at Hulikere (Mysore District) for the Irwin Canal, the longest of its kind in India. Here again all the planning and execution were entirely in Indian hands. The new Water-Works Scheme for Bangalore from the Tippegondanahalli Tank, 22 miles away, was also of Sir M. Visweswaraya's planning. For, though small and spare in physical appearance his vision is always big and his schemes of gigantic proportions. And in the realisation of those he will not spare himself any trouble in spite of his advanced age. As these lines are being written he is addressing himself to the task of starting the automobile industry in India after having travelled abroad with a view to collect information like any young and energetic *enterpreneur*. And this in his 75th year!

During 1928 occurred the now famous 'Bangalore Disturbances.' Hindu-Muslim riots, disfiguring the fair name

of Mysore and communal animosities ran high. There was much discontent and suspicion, and the credit of the Government itself for impartiality and strength to put down wrong-doers suffered considerable damage in the eyes of the public. There was eager demand for an impartial enquiry. It was lucky that at this juncture Sir M. Visweswaraya was available and agreed to be the Chairman of the Enquiry Committee. His association with it restored public confidence in no small measure, and afforded eloquent proof of the universal esteem with which he continued to be regarded by the people of Mysore.

An Advanced Nationalist

As might be expected from one of his wide travel, long experience and sturdy patriotism, Sir Visweswaraya holds advanced political views in regard to the Indian problem. His address as President of the South Indian States' Peoples' Conference (1929) pleaded for a fuller recognition of the rights of the States' subjects not only in their own States but for effective participation in the councils of the Central Government. His criticisms of the White Paper proposals went as far as any ardent nationalist would have desired, particularly in matters of Finance and Defence of the future Government of India. Retiring by nature, he has however, rarely figured on public platforms except as an exponent of schemes of economic and industrial reform. Perhaps the only political gathering of note wherein he figured was when he temporarily occupied the chair as President of the All Parties' Conference at Bombay (1922) on Sir C. Sankaran Nair withdrawing from it, when negotiations were afoot to induce Mahatma Gandhi to desist from his Passive Resistance programme.

The rapid industrialization of India is, however, a theme which he has made his own all these years, and every utterance of his in recent years either in public meetings or in convocation addresses comes back to this theme with unwearied zeal. His recent visits to foreign countries which have adopted 'plans of recovery,' and the impending changes in the constitution of the Indian Government have prompted him to present to the Indian public and the

Governments in this country a Ten-year Plan in his *Planned Economy for India* (1934).

This is a book that no one interested in the economic regeneration of India can afford to miss, and may be said to sum up the ideas and plans of Sir M. Visweswaraya as an economic thinker and constructive statesman. It is a forceful presentation, without any waste of words or attempt at rhetoric, of the economic position in India to-day and of proposals for reconstruction "calculated to so strengthen the Indian in the business sphere that he may, within the shortest period possible, become man for man as capable a citizen, as strong a national and as broadminded an international as his compeer in America, Europe or Japan."

The Dynamic Plan

"There have been no reasoned policies, no plan, no programme in the past to improve the income and the wealth of the people" continues the author in his preface and proceeds: "The country is in a position to-day—as it never was before—to advance to the front at a bound. The people have most of the facilities required for a big step forward. Enormous numbers of trained men and huge masses of uneducated population are waiting by the roadside to be picked up, drilled and put to work to increase production and service."

The first part of the book draws a picture of the present position of India as compared with economically advanced countries in the world in regard to agriculture, industries, transport and power supply, trade and commerce, and banking. The second part contains cut and dried schemes in regard to reconstruction, together with plans and estimates where necessary. The wealth of statistical information made available and the way it is marshalled make it a valuable work of reference not only to the student but to the publicist and statesman who wishes to get a clear perspective of the great task of reconstruction.

The implementing of all these suggestions, however, makes Swaraj a *sine qua non*. Sir M. Visweswaraya is not unaware of this and without mincing matters describes the present political position in the following words:

"The administration is practically conducted according to the will of a handful of Englishmen in power for the time being in the Government of India, the India Office and the British Cabinet. Not more than half a dozen Englishmen perhaps are concerned at any given time in the formulation and final control of the larger policies, which govern the fortunes of the 350 million people of this country" (p. 219).

Powerful Indictment

"Great Britain wants an investment market for her capital. So she feels she cannot let slip her financial control of India. Great Britain wants her market secured. This security is assured by a huge army maintained at the cost of the Indian tax-payer but absolutely under British control". (p. 339.)

"The net effect of the rule has been to lower the country in almost every field of human activity, to foster special interests and to impede the well-being of the vast masses of the population. A few people—an infinitesimal few—are well off, but millions of human beings are living in distress, misery, poverty and destitution". (p. 340).

"Nation-building would be impossible unless the control of finance is transferred to Indian hands from the very outset." (p. 343.)

The most radical Indian politician will find it hard to improve upon the above sentences.

Sir M. Visweswaraya is an impatient idealist anxious to see our country taking big strides to take her place among the industrially advanced nations of the world. He deplores the ruralisation of India, and would like to introduce measures to balance the rural and urban proportions of the population, and start without delay large-scale and medium-size industries. It was for this reason that at one time Sir M. Visweswaraya looked with disfavour on Khadi production, and expressed his opinion that it was proving to be such a waste of good talent and energy on the part of Indian national workers. But he later grew more reconciled to this aspect of Gandhian economics and had the frankness to say in opening the All-India Swadeshi Exhibition in 1931 :

"I am one of those who not long ago thought that hand-spinning and handweaving of Khaddar, while machinery could do the work so cheap, might prove a waste of effort, and that the energy and time spent on it might be more profitably employed. But in the present circumstances of the country, where there is such a redundant unemployed population and there is no organisation at all to relieve unemployment, no sane person will deny that Khaddar propaganda is serving a useful constructive purpose and that the efforts of the Congress Party in popularising Khaddar under the all-inclusive generalship of our great countryman, Mahatma Gandhi, are fully justified." The above qualified approval of the Khaddar programme because "there is no organisation at all to relieve unemployment" and the insistence with which Gandhiji looks upon Khaddar work as the very pivot of village and national reconstruction are a study in contrast between the ideas of two great contemporary Indians, both of them practical visionaries and impatient idealists.

Rules for Citizen Efficiency

The speed and intensity with which life is lived in the West have exercised a fascination on him and he has no patience with the slow-moving and easily contented attitude of the Indian yielding himself in pathetic resignation to the conditions obtaining around him. He would not like India to remain pre-eminently agricultural but would advocate measures which would convert this country into a vast manufacturing one, its huge populations living a more strenuous life, and enjoying a much higher standard of living than they do at present, better fed, better clothed, and benefiting by all the amenities of modern scientific inventions. He would like to see in India as close a conformity as possible with European and American standards in regard to the externals of living, in the matter of group-effort and discipline.

In fact Sir M. Visweswaraya has himself set down 'Rules for citizen efficiency' in his *Planned Economy for India*.

The Indian citizen will safeguard his future and, as far as in him lies, that of his country, by observing the following rules:

(1) PRACTISE SELF-HELP.—Work regularly a fixed minimum number of hours daily for six days in the week.

(2) KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.—Reduce illiteracy, encourage adult education and vocational training among members of your family and others over whom you have influence.

(3) CULTIVATE TEAM WORK.—Develop the habit of co-operation and be zealous of your integrity and promote mutual trust.

(4) PRACTISE THRIFT.—Put by at least one-twelfth of your earnings—(one month's earnings in a year) to provide for sickness, unemployment and hard times generally.

(5) INCREASE PRODUCTION AND SERVICE.—Use up-to-date equipment, working methods, tools and machinery and raise your own income and that of the country.

(6) SUPPORT INDIAN INDUSTRIES.—Develop industries and manufactures, make the country self-sufficient and increase employment.

(7) RESTRICT IMPORTS.—To keep money within the country, restrict imports and increase exports of manufactured goods and surplus raw materials, and build up credits abroad.

(8) MAINTAIN EFFICIENT STANDARDS.—Standardize business practices, social habits and methods of discipline as far as possible, to secure economy of time and effort. Adopt efficient policies, equipment and practices from progressive countries.

(9) THINK AND ACT INSTITUTIONALLY.—Maintain the work of associations, councils, committees, etc., with which you may be associated, or in which you may be interested, at a high level of efficiency to the limit of your power.

Personal Traits

In his own person, Sir Visweswaraya lives a simple, almost ascetic life. Whether in office or in retirement, his daily routine is methodical, and he follows the maxim which he once placed before a students' gathering at his old school, 8 hours for work, 8 hours for sleep, and 8 hours for food, exercise, recreation etc. Ever absorbed in schemes and work of one kind or another he has often failed as a judge of

men and has trusted with innocent faith that all that glittered was gold. He has been often misled into believing that those who came into contact with him partook of his own zeal and energy.

But even these failings have 'leaned to virtue's side' for not even his worst critics can doubt for a moment his sincerity or his high purpose. Personal preferment he has rarely sought. Modest to a fault he shrinks from the lime-light. Uncorrupted and incorruptible, his career as an official was marked by single-minded devotion to the discharge of his duties as a public servant, a rigid adherence to principles rather than persons, and an utter absence of self-seeking or nepotism of any kind.

Looking at Sir Visweswaraya's career, one cannot help feeling, however, a sense of regret that one of such sterling worth and character should have been able to realise but a fraction of his cherished dreams. But that is a tragedy that is fairly common in India to-day. The results achieved by gifted individuals in India are often hardly commensurate with the efforts put forth, and reflect but poorly the high aspiration and the genuine merit that sustain those efforts. Perhaps Sir Visweswaraya is born before his time. For under the aegis of a *Poorna Swaraj* Government, few could fill so worthily as he the highest offices in the country.

Sir Visweswaraya's mind is so capacious and well-ordered that every problem is presented by him with an incisive analysis of essentials, a throughness and concreteness that leave nothing to be desired. His speeches and writings are thus marked by great lucidity and directness—the ideas being presented in a terse and unequivocal manner. His most precious asset and his best gift to his countrymen, however, are his great earnestness, fervent patriotism and undaunted optimism.

K. S. G.

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